

petent to do all that may be required is that of obstetrics. Few physicians, however experienced, ever reach a point in self-confidence where they enter upon service at the trying hour of birth without a certain amount of worry.

Every childbirth is an emergency fraught with an exceedingly large variety of potential dangers to both mother and child. Most of these dangers are practically eliminated when the service is conducted by an educated physician, and particularly so when he is assisted by a competent nurse. Even under these favorable conditions, and even where the mother had had—as she always should have—the advice of the physician and her nurse during her 280 days of waiting, there are still hazards—several of them—which cannot be foreseen and which cannot always be handled successfully. To be sure, most of them are successfully met under favorable circumstances by skilled, intelligent physicians and the progress made in this field of medicine stands out as a shining light to the credit of scientific medicine.

In spite of these well known facts, some silly people still talk of childbirth as a natural and normal process. So it is in one sense; and so, too, is death. But when they claim, as many do, that because birth—and death—are normal processes, patients do not require skilled care, they, of course, are endorsing theories which they do not themselves practice. It is such murky, dangerous preachments and practices that are responsible for the retention of ignorant or inadequately educated midwives to serve our womenfolk and babies in the most difficult and trying hours for both.

It is the fear of the tongues and votes of these militant crusaders that makes state governments satisfy themselves by "licensing," and thus putting the state's approval upon this irresponsible, half-educated, benighted group of people who often do not know themselves how dangerous they are to the most precious elements of humanity. National government bureaus—one in particular that has invited and assumes great political responsibility for childbirth—is in no essential more far-seeing nor more enlightened in its actions than are most state and local governments. We are hearing particularly from this national government bureau much that constitutes criticism of the poor work of physicians in their services at childbirth. But just watch them as well as state governments put on the soft pedal and cover it with mush when they approach the midwife problem.

This national bureau with large funds—provided by your taxes—seconded by many states is forwarding a movement to "educate midwives." By education they mean a few "intensive courses" of a few weeks' duration. During these intensive courses, they may teach some of the midwives the dangers of dirt under the finger-nails, how to boil urine to see if it contains albumin, and how to charge and collect fees; but what little "education" these people absorb that is not completely neutralized by their "instincts" "superstitions," and "experience," will make them even more dangerous than they now are, because they will capitalize their "education," and

their state endorsement (license) will mean even more than it now does.

Some 10 per cent of the births in California are now attended by these irresponsibles, and they are doing it under the state's endorsement. The lives that are sacrificed, and, what is even more important, the injuries to both mother and child that occur as a result of incompetence, no one can know.

If we are really serious about making safer and better childbirth available for all mothers and babies, why not strike at the root of one of the most dangerous angles of the problem by eliminating our licensed midwives and making it at least as uncomfortable for the unlicensed ones as we do for other law violators?

A series of articles will shortly be published in *Better Health*, telling many illuminating facts about midwives in many countries, and in California in particular.

PRESIDENT PUSEY'S ADDRESS

It is heartening to read the masterly address of William Allen Pusey as president of the American Medical Association, delivered at the Seventy-fifth Annual Session at Chicago, June, 1924. Our president handled several of the most important problems calling loudly to us for solution with thinner gloves than are customarily used upon such occasions.

He gives courage to those who at times grow weary and hesitant in battling for the right; and he makes us all happy with a feeling of security that our leadership is again for another year in safe hands.

Everyone should read his address carefully and study it. Many, of course, will not take the trouble to do so. For these and for the convenience of all, we submit herewith a few of the high lights particularly worthy of study:

"It is nevertheless true that medicine, as a part of the present social organization, is passing through a time of extraordinarily rapid change."

"If medicine is to steer a proper course over the changing social sea, even during the next generation, it must give wise consideration to the present trend of society. For the social organization, all observers agree, is undergoing an actual revolution. And medicine is going with it."

"And so the trend has been continuously from individualism to socialism. As the social problems have become more acute, this trend has been more rapid."

"During the last decade," says Hadley, "the United States has witnessed a movement in the direction of state socialism . . . very different in character from anything which occurred in the century preceding."

"How far this trend is going before it is checked, no one can prophesy; but it is clear that our civilization is committed to a sort of socialism, to the effect that the economically fit and competent shall take care of the weak and inefficient. It is an unconscious endeavor to set aside the law of natural selection and to counteract Nature's cruel but salutary process of eliminating the unfit."

"Medicine is, in fact, particularly exposed to the

dangers of socialization, because the projects of socialism that obtain the first acceptance are those that have to do with health and physical welfare. There is an evident tendency now to appropriate medicine in the social movement; to make the treatment of the sick a function of society as a whole; to take it away from the individual's responsibilities and to transfer it to the state; to turn it over to organized movements. If this movement should prevail to its logical limits, medicine would cease to be a liberal profession and would degenerate into a guild of dependent employees."

"There is another side to this picture. There are influences which will in time, probably, first check the socialistic trend and then cause a reaction. Probably this will come only after sad experience and at high cost; but society gets on only with such penalties."

"In the first place, the effects of a natural law, such as that of the survival of the fittest, cannot be greatly modified nor long set aside by the puny efforts of man. In the next place, the machinery for all these socialistic and paternalistic enterprises will in time become so large and unwieldy that it will be impractical and fall to pieces."

"When, in addition to the ordinary machinery of government, we add the new machinery for running the mines and the railroads and the telegraph and the telephone and the wireless, for the regulation of capital and industry, for the stabilization of industry, for employment insurance and health insurance, for old age pensions, for socialized recreations and socialized neighborliness, for socialized health education and programs—when on top of these you pile the organizations for keeping the people from using opium and cocaine and alcohol and doing other things that are not good for them, for enforcing all sorts of laws that prohibit some of the population from doing things that another part thinks are wicked, for socialized nursing and medical care, for taking over obstetrics, child welfare and venereal diseases, for the care of the injured, crippled, and defective—when these activities, nearly all of them temporarily good in themselves, have developed to a certain point, the burden will become too great. The men taken from productive occupation and private enterprise that will be required to man them will be such a large proportion of the population that, sooner or later, the social fabric will give way. There will not be enough of the population left for production to take care of the administrators; and a reaction, if not a crash, will come."

"This is no imaginary situation. Attention is constantly being called to it. In view of his wise statesmanship, it is not surprising, but it is a reason for encouragement, that President Coolidge has opposed this trend in his definite stand against federal support of such activities."

"Society is usually saved from its own carelessness—except when a cataclysm occurs—by the persistence of a minority element which, through character, intelligence and force is able ultimately to exercise a controlling hand in the direction of affairs. If civilization is to be saved from the effects of a

socialized mediocrity, it will be by the presence in the community of this influential minority."

"How shall we in medicine oppose this destructive social trend? By making ourselves, in the first place, a part of the enlightened minority that is the salvation of democratic government—by being alert to the socialistic dangers to medicine and by aggressively opposing them; by opposing, as vigorously as can be done, the various governmental projects for practicing medicine, and the efforts of organizations, public and private, including medical schools and hospitals, to go into the practice of medicine as a business."

"If we accept without prudent foresight expedients to meet temporary difficulties, such as the Sheppard-Towner Act, medical service will soon be in the same situation as elsewhere in this country. It is not for the good of the people of the country that they should be spoon-fed in the matter of taking care of their physical ills any more than in any other matter in which they should take care of themselves."

"But, after all is said about the other problems and responsibilities of medicine, the greatest of these is the old homely one of treating men that are sick and injured. We hear so much now about preventive medicine, about medicine's new social responsibilities, that this old responsibility is failing to stand out in proper proportions."

"Prevention is an important function of medicine, and will doubtless become more so; but it is altogether likely that it will never be its chief function."

"We would like to see the day when physicians were not needed, but it can be confidently predicted that no such happy day will ever come. Sickness and injury will inevitably remain part of the lot of man."

"Carry our discoveries to the utmost limit, man is still a machine that will get out of order, will be injured and will ultimately wear out. As long as that is true, there will be need for the personal physician to take care of the individual patient."

SYMBIOTIC LIFE

A brief abstract of Doctor G. H. F. Nuttall's recent valuable address before the California Academy of Medicine is published elsewhere in this issue.

What a pity that so comparatively few physicians were able to hear the discussion of one of the most important subjects in biology and medicine by a most distinguished colleague. In the very nature of things, it is and always will be impossible for more than a comparatively few of those interested to hear any address. Then there is that large group of serious students who prefer always to read rather than hear communications on worthwhile subjects.

Many physicians feel the need of more lectures upon medical subjects by selected and invited speakers whose messages are promptly published in our own journals and thus made available to thousands of readers in our territory. This is being done in many places by special organizations of physicians alone or by associations of physicians and other citizens interested in the broader phases of medicine and private and public health. A splendid opportunity is before